

BOOK REVIEWS

Friends and Enemies in Penn's Woods: Indians, Colonists, and the Racial Construction of Pennsylvania. Edited by WILLIAM A. PENCAC and DANIEL K. RICHTER. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004. xiv, 336p. Illustration, notes, index, notes on contributors. Cloth, \$65; paper, \$22.95.)

Every now and again—but all too rarely—a collection of essays appears that lives up to its title. The editors of *Friends and Enemies in Penn's Wood*, William Pencak and Daniel Richter, have produced such a book. *Friends and Enemies* explores the ways in which neither conflict nor cooperation defined Pennsylvania's frontier during the eighteenth century. In the introduction, Pencak and Richter argue that the key to understanding “Penn's Woods” lies not in striking a balance between these two poles but in looking for the murky truth somewhere between them, in the cultural space between the middle ground and conquest. They and the authors move back and forth between “powerfully contradictory images” of “harmonious coexistence” and racialized “nightmare” (p. ix). Pennsylvania, they believe, represented both and neither. In a brilliant afterword to this fascinating volume, James Merrell agrees, suggesting that perhaps historians have ignored colonial Pennsylvania in general and its frontier in particular for this reason. As he argues, the fluidity of the eighteenth-century intercultural experience in Pennsylvania makes any defining processes difficult, yet intriguing, to pin down.

Each of the essays hovers around this essential dynamic in an original way. Together, they move us from an early period of uncertainty yet accommodation, when different groups with distinct traditions groped to make sense of each other, to the wars beginning in the 1750s that transformed Pennsylvania and that ended the prospect of any sort of coexistence. In telling this oft-told tale, however, the authors get us past the simple narrative of cooperation to conflict to inevitable hatreds. For, as each of the pieces imply, tension punctuated and animated the early period of cultural understanding in much the same way that the later story of the triumph of whiteness was not without instances of accommodation or the promise of possibilities.

The opening group of essays features glimpses of the early period of accommodation, how men and women found some common ground despite—and critically, because of—the challenges of mutual incomprehension. Carla Gerona's insightful study captures the spirit and dynamics of the period and section. In her piece on the dream world of Quakers and Native Americans, she illustrates how both groups shared common assumptions about the nature and meaning of the

unconscious and the “inner spirit.” Yet dreams and the shared assumptions about them also fostered tension, especially in the way in which Quakers interpreted common understandings of visions to justify the confiscation of Indian land. The middle part of the book, entitled “Fragile Structures of Coexistence,” elaborates on these broad themes, covering, for example, intercultural understandings and misunderstandings over justice (John Smolenski and Louis Waddell), diplomacy (William Starna), and religion (Amy Schutt). We see here that Euro-Americans and natives did not so much blend traditions as try to figure out ways to make both work, or more likely, to have one prevail over the other. Difference, in other words, created the conditions for mutuality. Similarly, discord often stemmed from similarities.

Of course, we know that at the end of the day there would be an end to this day, as tense accommodation gave way to racist violence. With the 1750s, the fluid lines men and women crossed with and without conflict hardened into distinct worlds of “Red” and “White.” The how and why of this process emerge as the theme of the final section of *Friends and Enemies*. In it, Krista Camenzind offers a suggestive, gendered interpretation of the Paxton Boys’ massacre of the innocent Conestogas at the close of the Seven Years’ War. To her credit, she tries to understand why they did what they did and avoids the breezy generalizations that often pass for analysis of the frightening incident. In another excellent piece, David Preston illustrates the erosion of any sort of common ground between squatters and Indians, but in doing so, he refuses to follow predictable story lines. The key to reckoning with the breakdown of intercultural understanding, he argues, lies in appreciating not the growing distance between the groups but their proximity. Native and newcomer lived as neighbors—men and women who shared, blurred, acknowledged, fought over, and ultimately contested boundaries. Good fences, ironically, created bad neighbors. Finally, in yet another thought-provoking essay from this book, Gregory Knouff discusses how “war and its memory were crucibles for the formation of popular racial ideology and the construction of the White male nation” (p. 239). Knouff’s analysis centers on how the experience of warfare, increasingly racialized as the War of Independence progressed, created the conditions for the emergence of “whiteness” as the organizing principle for the new nation. Far from assuming this much-banded-about category, therefore, each of these writers attempts to dissect it. Merrell argues that historians have not yet tapped into “the historical bounty” of Penn’s Woods (p. 262). In fact, the essays in this book seem to contradict his contention, suggesting that this may no longer be the case.